

15
SPEECH

OF

HON. JOHN BELL, OF TENN.,

ON THE

ACQUISITION OF CUBA.

DELIVERED IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES ON THE 25TH OF
FEBRUARY, 1858.

Mr. PRESIDENT: But for the discouraging circumstances with which I am surrounded, the lateness of the hour, and the exhausted condition of the Senate, I would reply to some of the remarks of the Senator from Connecticut, (Mr. DIXON,) who has just taken his seat, on the subject of the degradation which he supposes must necessarily be the attendant of free labor in the South. I have long been aware that the opinions of northern gentlemen on this subject, founded as they are, for the most part, on theoretical deductions, rather than actual observation, are not only erroneous, but have had a mischievous tendency at the North. I must, however, leave the remarks of the Senator from Connecticut to be noticed by others.

Under present circumstances, I shall confine myself to the expression of such views upon the immediate question before the Senate as I think of greater practical bearing and importance. Extraordinary as the proposition before the Senate is, if it had found its way into the Senate by leave granted, in courtesy to the Senator from Louisiana, (Mr. SLIDELL,) distinguished as he is by talents and sagacity, I should have felt no disposition to engage in the discussion of it; but, sir, it is presented under far more imposing auspices. As it now comes before us, it is pressed upon our favorable notice and acceptance by all the persuasive force which the recommendation of the President and the sanction of the Committee on Foreign Relations can give to it; and what is more significant still, in these latter days of the Republic, it is said to have the support and countenance of an authoritative council of the dominant political party in the Senate and in the country; and whether it shall receive the sanction of Congress at its present session or not, or whether, indeed, it was intended that it should, it is now manifest that this and the kindred measures recommended in the annual message of the President are to form the staple of political controversy and agitation for the next four years—to be installed as the successors, by regular and legitimate descent, to those issues which have excited and convulsed the country during the four that have just passed.

This proposition is remarkable in itself, as well from the magnitude of the sum proposed to be placed under the control of the President, as from the time, considered in reference to the financial and other circumstances in the condition of the country, selected to bring it forward; but it challenges our especial wonder, from the boldness and apparent confidence with which its

advocates defy public criticism and scrutiny into its motives and objects, and from the principles and doctrines by which it is sought to be sustained and vindicated.

It is proposed to place thirty millions of dollars at the disposal of the President, as a step preliminary to entering upon a negotiation with Spain for the acquisition of Cuba. This sum, great as it is, if it were fit and proper to be granted in any case, (which I doubt,) and if it had been called for in view of any probable contingency, such as it is said may possibly occur, might perhaps not deserve to be regarded as disproportioned to the magnitude of the object to be obtained; but no such contingency is at all probable, and the proposition, standing as it does, naked and defenceless upon any other ground of fitness and propriety, has very much the aspect of a bold experiment, to test the extent to which the public credulity and the loyalty of partisan followers may be successfully practised upon; and nothing causes me to hesitate in adopting this conclusion but the practical character of the statesmanship of the Senator from Louisiana, who may be regarded as the prime mover of the proposition, and my belief that he never makes a move without some more direct object.

Questions of a somewhat similar character are sometimes brought forward in the British Parliament to test the strength of the minority; and I have known some such raised in Congress, rather with a view to manifest confidence in the President, than from any conviction of their necessity or propriety on public account; but if the vote asked on this measure is designed as a vote of confidence in the President, and nothing more, then I think that his friends are taxed beyond all measure of reason or propriety. A vote to place thirty millions of dollars in the hands of the President for this or any other object, would imply a total forgetfulness and abandonment of the jealousy of Executive power, upon which the Constitution was framed. It would be a most dangerous precedent, which, in the progress and tendency of this government, would soon and inevitably become established practice. Thirty millions of dollars would give the President control of the army and navy for two years after the regular annual appropriations were exhausted. A usurper or traitor to the liberties of his country would ask no more. And though Mr. Buchanan might be relied upon to dispense so large a fund, honestly and for the purposes intended, yet among his successors, long before our empire shall extend throughout the tropics, there may be found one whose ambition may not be subdued and regulated by the temperate passions of our present Chief Magistrate; and should that other measure, twin-born with this, be adopted, which proposes to give the President the power to employ, at his discretion, the land and naval forces of the country in redressing all the wrongs done our citizens resident in Mexico and in the Central American States—thus investing him with the war-making power—I would not answer for the perfect good faith and fidelity even of our present virtuous Chief Magistrate in the administration of so large a trust as thirty millions of dollars.

But dismissing this view of the subject for the present, and assuming that something more is intended by this proposition than to get a mere vote of confidence, I proceed to inquire what other motives and objects may be at the bottom of the movement.

The island of Cuba, by its commanding position in the group to which it belongs, the control which it may aspire to hold over the Gulf and neighboring seas, its comparatively temperate climate, the fertility of its soil, its capacity to supply to commerce a large amount of the richest and most desirable products of the tropics, and its capacious harbors, has, from an early day, been a coveted object with the great commercial and maritime powers of Europe; and from the date of the acquisition of Louisiana—or, I may say, from the first

dawning of the settlements and population which now spread over the great central valley of the North American continent—the possession of that island has been regarded by the wisest statesmen of the country as likely to become, in time, of great importance to the security of its commerce and the development of its resources. Nor have the commercial and maritime powers of Europe, our rivals in the great contest for the control of the commerce of the world, been blind to the advantages which would result to the United States from the possession of Cuba, whenever the time should come, in the progress of events, when that contest would have to be decided by the superiority of naval armaments. Hence it has happened, that just in proportion as the magnitude of the interests involved in the possession of Cuba has been developed by time, the obstacles to its acquisition by the United States have been increased and multiplied. If we have great interests at stake in acquiring the possession of that island, our commercial rivals suppose that they have an equal interest in preventing its transfer to us; and they have shaped their policy accordingly.

From the time the Spanish Crown was stripped of its provinces on this continent, by successful revolt, it was the true policy of the United States, with a view to the ultimate acquisition of Cuba, to cultivate the most amicable and cordial relations with Spain—not insidiously, but in good faith—giving assurances of support and protection, in maintaining its dominion over this small remnant of its once imperial possessions in America; neither encouraging rebellion within, nor invasion from without. By steadily adhering to this policy the government of the United States might, in time, have acquired a beneficent influence in the Spanish councils, leading to the adoption of a more liberal and enlightened policy of government in the island, conciliating the Creole population by extending to them an equal participation in official employments with the natives of Spain, and promoting the development of the agricultural industry and other resources of the island, by lessening the burdens upon commerce. Such would have been a policy worthy of this Republic, and could not have failed to bring with it great advantages to the United States. The mischievous and hostile policy of the great maritime powers of Europe would have been successfully encountered and combated, increased trade and commerce would have followed, and in fact all the substantial advantages of the actual possession of the island would have been secured, except the strategic position in war, and that would have been within our control when necessary to self-preservation; and finally, when, in the vicissitudes and changes of fortune incident to Spain, as well as all other nations, it should have become expedient to her interests to transfer the sovereignty of Cuba for a just equivalent, she could have found in the steady friendship of the United States a justification of the transfer, without any sacrifice of national pride or dignity. Thus, sir, the prize would have been won; like ripe fruit it would have fallen, without noise or commotion, into the lap in which by the laws of both natural and political attraction it should find its permanent position.

The policy which I have attempted to sketch was conceived and pursued, as far as practicable, by the eminent men who, for a long period, had the direction of our affairs. For confirmation of this statement, I need refer to no other proofs than those cited in the report of the committee, taken from private letters and the official correspondence between this government and our ministers at the court of Spain.

Sir, there has been a perfect accord in the sentiments and opinions of all the most distinguished men of the country, who have spoken or written on the subject, from Jefferson down to a late day, upon all the points which form the basis of a sound policy in relation to Cuba. All agreed that the possession of

that island, under proper circumstances, would be a desirable acquisition, and that, in process of time, it might become indispensable to the security and full development of the power and resources of the country. All agreed that the transfer of the sovereignty of Cuba to any nation more powerful in its resources than Spain should be resisted by the United States at any hazard; and all agreed that as long as it should be the pleasure of Spain to hold the island, without any change in its condition which might endanger the neighboring States of the Union, it would be neither just nor politic to seek to disturb her rule; and it is manifest that they all perceived and felt, rather than expressed, how eminently perilous and destructive it would be to the prospective condition and value of the island, in a commercial and economical point of view, should the acquisition of it be attempted by force, even in a just and necessary war.

It was under a just appreciation of the difficulties and embarrassments which, by virtue of the considerations I have endeavored to point out, necessarily environed the project of the acquisition of Cuba, that the wisest of our statesmen have ever manifested the greatest forbearance, moderation, and delicacy in the conduct of our relations with Spain.

But, sir, the times have changed. New theories of national progress—of national strength and development—new ideas of national glory have sprung up. A new order of statesmen, more spirited and adventurous, if you please, has arisen, seized the reins of the chariot of state, and now assumes to direct its course.

Immediate proximity, kindred population, and some notion of the necessity of maintaining the equilibrium of power between the North and South, led to the acquisition of Texas, in 1845. As some compensation to the North, and to sustain and strengthen the position of those northern men who had supported the annexation of Texas, and it may be with some impression of the expediency of a bold and dashing stroke of policy, in order to rally to the support of the administration the flagging loyalty of followers who found themselves excluded in the first division of the spoils, Mr. Polk announced his purpose of giving the necessary notice to terminate the conventional arrangements under which Oregon had been occupied by British subjects, and to open the fine region on the Pacific coast to settlement by American citizens as far north as $54^{\circ} 40'$ of north latitude. Upon that line he took his stand, and declared his determination not to recede from it. It was said that he had made up his mind to fight before he would budge an inch. But John Bull was not to be terrified by threats. There was some war fever getting up in the country; but when it became known that there was an unusual stir in the British dockyards, the administration, in retreating hastily upon the 49th parallel, was not supposed to have gotten with overmuch honor out of the dilemma in which it had so rashly placed itself. The disappointment among the war spirits was great. It was said that the administration was disgraced. It was in danger of a collapse. Something was to be done to retrieve it. What was before merely expedient, had now become absolute necessity. There was no other resource, and Mr. Polk fell upon Mexico with a fury increased by a sense of his disastrous encounter with British pride and obstinacy. Soon after the war was entered upon, it was announced that it would not be concluded without "indemnity for the past, and security for the future." This was well understood by the country as pointing to a further acquisition of territory. To vindicate the administration in making war upon a neighboring republic, with a view to despoil it of its territory, for causes and provocations admitting of other modes of redress, and to make the war popular, the columns of all the public journals in the interest of the administration teemed with stirring appeals to the national pride—to the popular passions and sympathies; denoun-

cing "a tame and narrow policy;" scouting the idea of chaining down and restraining the energies and enterprise of this great people within their existing limits; insisting that it was the mission of this great republic, and especially of the Democracy, to extend the "area of freedom," and to confer the benefits of our free and glorious system of government upon the whole continent; proclaiming that all this was "destiny," which could not be thwarted by the intervention of the narrow views and timid counsels of men. The age, it was said, was progressive, and whoever should refuse to go with the current would soon be overwhelmed by its increasing force, and swept forever from public view. Such was the effect of the confident and seemingly oracular announcement of these sentiments and doctrines upon the imaginations of the ardent, ambitious, and adventurous youth of the country, and upon thousands beside, who had long before passed the youthful period of life; and such the strength imparted to the administration, that, thus encouraged, and further emboldened by the eclat and the brilliant successes which attended our arms in Mexico, there was, as I have the strongest reason to believe, but forty-eight hours between a Cabinet resolve to hold all Mexico and the decision to accept the Trist treaty.

It is not surprising that the close of the Mexican war, under these circumstances, left a large class of our population deeply imbued with the sentiments and passions which had taken root during its progress. This was the commencement of the fillibustering era. The policy then inaugurated, if policy it can be called, gathered strength, and enlisted in its support many gallant spirits and intelligent men in 1849-'50, from causes which I need not rehearse. It was then, too, that the idea of a great southern Republic, long cherished by a few prominent individuals in the South, received a threatening and dangerous development.

The influence of the passion for the acquisition of more territory, and the attendant spirit of fillibusterism, inspired by the grand conception of the so-called "destiny of the country," became so powerful that it was regarded as an element of strength in the party contests of the day, too important to be slighted or overlooked, but, on the contrary, demanding to be courted and propitiated.

Walker, with all his errors—imputed errors, if you please—was in his original designs and ultimate aims but a type of a large class—a representative of the eager and impatient advocates of expansion, and he was the victim of his faith in their power to promote his views. He calculated with confidence upon the connivance of the government through their influence, but he was deceived. The expedition of Lopez, and the terrible fate which attended him, with many of his companions, in Cuba, may be traced to the same cause—an over-estimate of the strength of a sentiment which had the power to defeat in some districts the execution of the law for the preservation of our neutral obligations, and which was sufficient to impair and neutralize to some extent, even if it could not wholly prevent, the intervention of the government.

Passing over, for the present, these and other mishaps, which have followed in the train of this new-born passion for expansion, let us see what has been its effect upon our relations with Spain, and the prospect of acquiring Cuba. For half a century Spain has been well aware that the ultimate acquisition of that island was the cherished policy of the United States; but though often alarmed by the prevalence of a revolutionary spirit among the Creole population of the island, she has reposed in perfect security, as to any attempts to seize it by force, under the solemn and oft-repeated assurance of the government that no such designs were entertained.

Neither the expedition of Lopez nor any other organized within our jurisdiction, and attempted from our shores, appears to have destroyed the confidence

of Spain in this government; nor did her acceptance of the proffered aid of Great Britain and France, at that period, necessarily imply a total loss of such confidence, as she might, and probably did, infer that the violations of public law which had taken place within the jurisdictional limits of the United States were the result of a lawless spirit of adventure, too widely diffused and too powerful to be suppressed by the federal authorities. A vigorous administration, wise counsels, and a skilful diplomacy might still have restored the former *status* of our relations with that government; but the policy of expansion, the rage for further acquisition, and the fillibustering spirit engendered and fostered by it, had the effect of precipitating the government into a course of policy in relation to Cuba, well calculated to defeat the object sought to be accomplished. All prudential considerations, all the usual modes of proceeding, appear to have been thrown aside in the conduct of our diplomatic intercourse with Spain upon that subject. It was supposed, however, that blundering indiscretion had culminated in the publication of the Ostend manifesto in 1855, announcing to the world, in substance, that the time had come when the acquisition of Cuba could no longer be delayed, and that, a voluntary cession by purchase failing, the obligation of self-preservation would make it an imperative duty to wrest the island from Spain by force; but it seems to me that the echo which we have in this second manifesto, couched, it is true, in other terms, but expressive of the same conclusions with the first, if intended to conduct to the cession of Cuba by peaceful negotiation, has even less to recommend it as a means to an end. If the Ostend manifesto was calculated to drive Spain to a determination never to cede Cuba to the United States, and to accept a guarantee from Great Britain and France to sustain her in that purpose, this new manifesto, published under the sanction of the President, and further endorsed by the Committee on Foreign Relations of the American Senate, can scarcely fail to cement and confirm the most hostile and opposite factions in Spain, in the unalterable resolve to submit to every sacrifice, incur every hazard, even to the extremity of an unequal war, if need be, in resisting the pretensions of our government in relation to Cuba; and finally, if they shall find the day approaching when they must yield the coveted possession to superior power and resources, they will yield it in the condition of a blackened ruin. The last spring of the hunted and bayed tiger, even after the mortal dart has reached its vitals, is often the most fatal to its pursuers.

But why, it is asked, should this proposition be considered so grievous an insult to the Spanish Crown? Why should it be regarded in any sense as offensive to the pride of the people and government of Spain, simply to ask the cession of a small part of their dominion in exchange for a just equivalent? I answer that there is no reason why it should be so regarded, if the usual observances and courtesies had been practised in making the proposal.

It is the violation of all these, in the manner in which the proposition has been urged upon the Spanish government, that is calculated to give offence. Not only was the offer to purchase Cuba made public, but the argument by which it was accompanied, implying a menace of war, was blazoned to the world in the Ostend manifesto; and the same course is now pursued in a more offensive form, because under higher official sanction.

No nation or government, however reduced in power or resources, so long as it is still regarded as one of the great family of nations, would be likely to receive with favor an offer to purchase a part of its territorial possessions, made under the seal of secrecy and confidential intercourse, when prefaced by a studied reminder of its decayed power and fallen fortunes. Every nation is presumed to know its own affairs quite as well as its neighbors; and the government of the smallest power in Europe would be apt to reject with scorn a proposition to cede a part of its territory to a purchaser who had previously under-

taken to expose to the world the necessities of its treasury, its internal dissensions, its feebleness and inadequate resources to maintain the integrity of its dominions.

Another mistake, and perhaps not the least that has been made in relation to this subject, is the public call upon Congress to provide a fund of thirty millions of dollars in advance of any further negotiation with Spain. The money, if granted, is doubtless meant to be applied without the violation of any of the proprieties belonging to such negotiations; but it is liable to an interpretation which could not advance the object. Besides, it is unprecedented in the history of the country. The recommendation by Mr. Jefferson, of a grant of two millions, in 1802, to effect a cession of Louisiana from France, was made in a confidential message, and was considered and acted upon in secret session in both houses of Congress; and so of the grant of a similar amount in 1806, before entering upon a negotiation for the cession of Florida from Spain. The grant of three millions of dollars to aid in effecting a treaty with Mexico in open session is not a precedent in point in this case. The latter grant was made during the pendency of a war with Mexico, when that country had no representative near this government, and no means of acquiring information of what was going on here; but even under those circumstances, and when the war was still raging, the policy of making the grant public was of questionable expediency. The most corrupt faction, in the most corrupt government that ever existed, will recoil from a bribe when openly tendered.

If such be the natural and probable, as I suppose them to be, not to say the certain and inevitable results and consequences of the extraordinary, and I undertake to add, when considered with reference to the object avowed—the peaceful cession of Cuba to the United States—the before unimagined, or rather unimaginable, mode of proceeding adopted by the last and present administration, it appears to me that it would be nothing short of infatuation in any man to suppose or believe that success could attend it; nor can I bring myself to the conclusion that the intelligent and experienced official functionaries who initiated and persist in this anomalous mode of conducting an important negotiation have had any expectation of effecting a cession of Cuba from Spain, by the resources of legitimate diplomacy, since the date of the Ostend manifesto. But, bound as I am to concede to them patriotic motives, I am driven to the conclusion that the Ostend manifesto was opened and published to the world, and the present proceeding adopted under the conviction that the acquisition of Cuba, if left to the slow progress of time and peaceful negotiation, would have to be postponed to an indefinite period, and that it was expedient, in conformity with the spirit and requirements of the times, to prepare the country for war, as the only mode of obtaining so desirable an object.

I am confirmed in taking this view of the subject by the tenor of the report which accompanies the bill under discussion. It is a skilful and ably drawn paper. It appeals to all the passions which give the greatest activity to social and political movements. It addresses itself especially to the cupidity or the lust of gain peculiar to every section, as the supposed predominant and characteristic trait of American character. It appeals to all the most widely diffused industrial interests and pursuits of the country. To the commercial and manufacturing interests of the East and North, it holds out the inducements of an enlarged field of enterprise for the one, and a new and profitable market for the other. To the agricultural States of the West it promises a demand for provisions and breadstuffs to an almost fabulous extent; to the South it presents a more extensive field for the profitable employment of slave labor. Its only weak point is the omission to indicate how the iron interest of Pennsylvania is to be promoted; but all deficiencies of this kind are compensated by the promise

of cheap sugar. Thus is the importance of Cuba magnified, and these are the temptations presented to the people to reconcile them to a war for its acquisition. But there will be no war now for any cause. This is not the administration which is to make the war; it is to be made under the auspices of a new one. The Ostend manifesto had some agency in making one President. This new manifesto may serve to make another, or it may renew the term of the present incumbent. It may be intended as the rallying summons to his discouraged followers after the repulse on the Lecompton question:

"Once more unto the breach, dear friends—once more!"

I repeat, there will be no war now. There is no stir of preparation; no laying of war taxes. We hear of propositions, on the contrary, for the reduction and cutting down of the public defences and existing military establishments.

But though neither the early acquisition of Cuba is expected to be promoted by this measure, nor any war to be urged at this time, still other important results are expected from this movement.

The honorable Senator from Louisiana has told us that he anticipates advantages from this movement to the President, to the Democratic party, and to the country. I will not question the patriotic motives of the honorable Senator who has taken the lead in bringing this measure before the country at this time, but I must say that I differ wholly from him as to the wisdom and expediency of the movement, whether as a means of effecting the acquisition of Cuba, or of promoting any great public interest. On the contrary, I regard it as calculated in its tendency to defeat or postpone the acquisition of Cuba for a long and indefinite period; but what is far more to be regretted, to defeat and postpone the very greatest public object that can occupy the thoughts of a statesman at this day, and which claims his undivided energies in its accomplishment; I mean the healing of the deep and grievous wounds which have been inflicted upon, and yet rankle and fester in our system of government—wounds inflicted by long-continued and fierce party contentions—engendering maxims and practices in the administration of the government which threaten to bring irretrievable discredit upon the very name of republican, or free institutions.

If there ever was a time in our history when the character of the government itself, and all the great and vital interests of the country, call loudly and imploringly for some respite, some brief interval of repose, from these eternal and distracting conflicts, it is now.

Whoever has studied, whether from observation or history, the causes which lead to disorders in a government, must be aware that periods of internal dissensions and strife are the very seed-times of the grossest corruption, and abuse of all kinds. For five years the public mind in every section of the Union has been so excited, distracted, and absorbed by questions of supposed paramount interest, that there has been no ear in Congress, no ear among the people, open to receive or heed complaints of abuse, no eye to see the evidences of mal-administration, no time or attention to bestow upon their correction, though all the while sapping the very foundations of all good government. But now, after so long a period of intense excitement, driving the country to the very verge of convulsion and civil war—if indeed we can be said to have been exempt from this last calamity—and when, in the meantime, a great monetary and commercial revulsion has swept over the land, striking down many of the most important industrial pursuits, deranging the public finances, reducing the national treasury to bankruptcy, while the public expenditures have continued to increase, and when withal the grossest abuses are admitted to abound in nearly every branch of the public service, I consider it a great public calamity at such a time to have this new subject of excitement and agitation thrust before the country.

Is it, or can it be considered, important for any public purpose that fresh fuel should be laid on the decaying fires of internal dissensions and controversy; or has it come to this, that the consequences of a total cessation of sectional strife are looked upon with regret and apprehension in any quarter, north or south? No one who will reflect upon the subject a moment but must see, that so far as it may be a matter of vital interest to the country to secure the admission of Cuba into the Union as a slave State, without jar or disturbance to the general harmony, after the possession of that island shall be secured by peaceful negotiation, "a masterly inactivity" at the present time is the true policy; and as to a forcible seizure of it, I have before shown that the chances are, that when thus acquired it would be a blasted and worthless possession.

If I may be allowed to conjecture what other results may follow the introduction of this measure into Congress at the present time, which may promote the interests of the dominant party, other than those I have already indicated, I would suggest that it may serve to distract and divert the public attention from the great increase of the public expenditures, which have nearly doubled within the last five years, and to check the progress of searching inquiry into the frauds and corruptions which have abounded within the same period.

I have said all I think proper to say at this time upon the specific proposition before the Senate, the probable motives and objects of its introduction, and the false or erroneous policy which has been pursued by the government for some years past in relation to this subject.

As to the question of the expediency of annexing Cuba to the United States now, or at an early period, there is a difference of opinion, so far as my knowledge extends, in the southern section of the Union.

While there are many earnest advocates of the policy of immediate annexation, there are many others who believe that the drain of capital and labor from the planting States, to be employed in Cuba, would be so great as to materially retard and obstruct their progress and development. As for myself, while I think that, in view of the interruptions to which our commerce and international relations are exposed, from the restless spirit of adventure and the insatiate desire for more territory which prevail among a portion of our population, we should neglect no occasion which may put it in our power to acquire the sovereignty of Cuba, with the consent of Spain, without disparagement to the national character, or incurring the hazard of war, and when thus acquired to hold and govern it as a territory, or to admit it into the Union as a State, as may be found expedient, in every other view of the subject, however important, and even indispensable to the safety and full development of the power and resources of the country, the possession of Cuba may become at some future period, I would regard it as the better and wiser policy, at this stage of our national progress, neither to seek nor accept a cession of that island upon any terms Spain may be disposed to accede to. The acquisition of Cuba, at this time, would bring with it the necessity of providing and maintaining a great and expensive navy. Without such a preparation, the acquisition of the island would be a source of positive weakness, instead of strength, to the United States, in the contingency of a war with any of the great maritime powers of Europe. The first blow struck by England, in a war with us, would fall upon Cuba, as the position from which she could give us the greatest annoyance;—the next, or simultaneously with the first, would fall upon our possessions on the Pacific coast. These would be our weak points in any system of military defences we can adopt, in the present circumstances of the country. One such point of attack is enough, until it shall become our policy to maintain a costly and powerful naval armament; and until then, Cuba had better remain under the dominion of Spain.

What our policy, at this time, dictates in relation to Cuba is, to effect a treaty with Spain, by which all existing subjects of controversy growing out of past transactions shall be adjusted, our commercial and general intercourse with the island relieved from restrictions and embarrassments, which are alike injurious to the interests of both parties, and may be the source of further and more serious complications. These objects, I firmly believe, would long since have been accomplished, but for the unfortunate obtrusion of the idea of acquisition, as the one of prominent importance in our negotiations.

We now enjoy a profitable commerce with Cuba; and if no untoward circumstance should occur in its condition, doubtless the annexation of it to the United States would increase the extent and value of that commerce; but suppose the population of the island should reach the maximum required by the sugar-planting and other pursuits adapted to its soil and climate, still the demand thus created for the provisions and breadstuffs—the corn, flour, beef, and pork—would not exceed a small fraction of the supplies of those products in the great agricultural States of the West lying north of the cotton-growing region. Nor can we suppose that the dream of cheap sugar would prove less delusive, when we consider the increasing consumption of that product in all the civilized, prosperous and growing populations in the temperate latitudes of the world.

But, Mr. President, extraordinary as this proposition is, to place thirty millions of dollars in the hands of the President, to be applied at his discretion in effecting a treaty; unprecedented as it is in the manner and circumstances under which it is brought forward; unconstitutional and dangerous as it is in principle, it is not so objectionable as the pernicious doctrines and theories of public policy which have been gravely announced by its advocates to sustain and justify it. “The law of our national existence is growth. We cannot, if we would, disobey it.” “The tendency of the age is the expansion of the great powers of the world.” “When they cease to grow, they will soon commence that period of decadence which is the fate of all nations, as of individual man.”

These are the doctrines and theories seriously asserted and put forth to the country under the sanction of a committee of the Senate of the United States; and though stated with all the precision and confidence with which axioms or established maxims in political philosophy or science might justify, they are neither well-founded in theory nor sustained by the truths of history. Whether the growth asserted to be the law of a nation’s existence is meant to apply to a great nation or a small one, to internal progress and improvement, or to territorial expansion, the proposition is equally fallacious. The growth of a nation in wealth or in population, or in territorial extent, whether under a free or a monarchical government, may be impeded, for whole generations, by misrule, by the frequent recurrence of pestilences, by exhausting wars, foreign or domestic, or both combined, and yet that nation may maintain its existence as an independent power, and its people retain all their native or original spirit and energies. Growth in territorial extent, least of all has any necessary connexion with the existence or extinction of a nation. The analogy between the youth, manhood, decline, and death of individual man, and the rise, maturity, decline, and final extinction of a nation, though striking in some circumstances, fails as a basis of logical reasoning, in deducing the necessity of a like fate to both. There is no inexorable physical law which assigns to nations, as to man, a date beyond which they must perish. There are laws, both moral and physical, by the observance or neglect of which, man may shorten his days, or prolong them beyond the ordinary span of human existence; and these laws have a controlling influence over the fate of nations, but, of necessity, doom none to inevitable extinction. By conforming to their requirements, nations may exist for thousands of years, or by the neglect or violation of them come to a premature

end. The fall of the ancient republics and great monarchies so often referred to as showing the impending fate of the nations of modern Europe, may be traced to conditions and circumstances of their existence, and other causes, which do not prevail at all, or not with the same force and in the same combination, in modern times.

I shall not attempt to discriminate the differences between the causes which led to the fall of the ancient commonwealths and empires, and those to which modern nations are exposed; nor shall I stop here to point out the peculiar circumstances in our condition which may arrest the growth and development of this country, and which expose us as a nation—a Republic—to the chances of a premature decay and early extinction; but I cannot omit to warn the Senate and the country that these peculiar circumstances of our condition demand the study at this time of every patriot—of every statesman in the land. Speculations as to whether there is a limit to the duration of all States and nations fixed by inexorable laws are idle. Were it given me to unroll the scroll of time, and I could see inscribed upon its folds an allotment of existence to this confederated Republic extending to half the term of Greek or Roman power, I should be rejoiced.

But, sir, I proceed to a more practical view of the subject. It is but too manifest that the growth asserted in the report of the committee as the law of our national existence, refers to territorial expansion, assuming that in our progress as a nation or people, we have arrived at that point of maturity within our present limits which impels us to further acquisition of territory, if we would avoid entering upon the period of decadence which leads to extinction. If this is not the meaning and application of the doctrine laid down in the report of the committee, taken in connexion with the further statement, that “the tendency of the age is the expansion of all the great powers of the world,” I am at a loss to conceive for what purpose it was introduced.

What, sir! is it pretended that we have done all that a government or nation can do in the improvement, and subjection to the uses of man, of the wide expanse of our present territorial area? Have we brought it all within the pale of regular government—of law and order? Have the arts of civilization penetrated and extended their benign influences over every part of it? Have all our institutions, social and political, reached such perfection, that no field is left for further effort, sufficient to stimulate or reward the labors of statesmen? Has our once vast public domain been so reduced and narrowed down as to leave no room for the employment of the industry and energies of an enterprising and overflowing population? Is there so little remaining to be done in any department of human effort within the sphere of our present territorial dominion, worthy of a noble ambition, that we must needs enlarge our borders, by the addition of new regions for its gratification?

The dominion of the United States now embraces an area nearly double that of the Roman empire in its palmiest days, and only about one-fourth less than that of all Europe. Exhibited in square miles, the territory of the United States is nearly three millions. That of the Roman empire was never estimated at more than one thousand six hundred square miles. Measured by acres, the land surface of the territory within our limits may be set down at one thousand five hundred millions, of which it appears by the last census returns that not more than eight per cent., or about one hundred and twenty millions of acres, are improved and under cultivation.

Within this vast territorial area, the whole number of inhabitants does not exceed thirty millions—less by six millions than the population of France, with a territory of two hundred thousand square miles. If we deduct one-third of the entire area of the United States, or one million of square miles, as unfit for cultivation—a large allowance—the remainder, or two millions of

square miles, taking the ratio of the population of France as the basis of the estimate, would sustain a population exceeding three hundred millions. It passes my powers of reasoning to reconcile these facts with the idea of any necessity for the acquisition of more territory for at least half a century.

But there are some other and important considerations to be weighed before we enter upon the grand career of conquest and annexation, to which we are invited by many of the leading spirits of the age. Besides the high moral duty of laboring for the general amelioration and improvement of the condition of the vast territory we already possess, to the utmost extent within the powers of government to accomplish these ends, the obligation of protection and defence attaches with equal force. By the acquisition of New Mexico and California our own frontier line has been increased to more than ten thousand miles; five thousand of which is sea-coast, exclusive of the interior lines of the various sounds, bays, and inlets, which measure as much more. The frontier line which bounds the British possessions on the north is three thousand miles in extent, and that which separates us from Mexico more than one thousand. Besides these exterior frontier lines we have an interior frontier of three thousand miles, at the lowest estimate, constantly exposed to the hostile incursions of nomadic and other Indian tribes, making altogether a frontier of thirteen thousand miles. I leave it to military men to say what amount of land and naval force would afford reasonable security on so extensive a line of exposed frontier against the attacks of a powerful enemy. I venture the assertion that no man of any military science and experience will say that a less land force of disciplined troops than one hundred thousand, and a fleet of one hundred and fifty of those terrible engines of modern warfare called war steamers, would do to begin a war with any such powers as England or France; and even with that amount of preparation, we should have to be content with the defence only of the most important and vital points. Why, sir, the fifteen thousand efficient troops of our standing army at this time, with the best disposition which can be made of them, are inadequate to give complete protection to our frontier settlements against the ravages of the Indian tribes. To make good the vaunting and pompous defiance of the two greatest nations of Europe, which we sometimes hear uttered on the floor of the Senate, double the amount of force, both military and naval, which I have before suggested, would not more than suffice; and then only in a defensive war. I do not doubt that the resources of this country, and the spirit and energy of the people, would, in a few years after the entrance into a war with either of the great maritime powers of Europe, or with both combined, be competent to place our military and naval defences upon a footing to give reasonable security and protection to every part of our widely extended dominion; but that is not the question. It is, whether it would not be a most unwise and reckless policy to seek a further extension of territory at the hazard of provoking expensive wars, when that which we already possess far exceeds the wants of our population, and our capacity to improve and develop its resources for generations to come.

There is another question involved in the policy of further expansion deserving attention. The structure of our system of government is such as to admit of its efficient operation over an extent of country far greater than any other form of free government that has ever been devised. But the theory of its capability to endure indefinite expansion, without impairing its efficiency, cannot, in the nature of things, be well founded. There is, there must be, some limitation to the extent of country or territory over which our system of government, with all its advantages, can be administered, either beneficially, efficiently, or with a due economy; and I think it is demonstrable, from the experience we have had, that the policy of expansion has already been carried to the utmost verge of a safe and expedient limit.

This government has never, until of late, been brought to a test of its capacity to adapt itself to a vast territorial dominion, and to the exercise of authority over States and Territories far distant from the seat of power. And what have been the results of the experiment, so far as it has been tried? I think it may be affirmed with truth, that every disorder, irregularity, and abuse incident, to some extent, in the administration of a government in a more limited territorial jurisdiction, has been increased and multiplied about in the ratio of its extension; and this results, in part, from the necessity of allowing a greater latitude of discretion to the officers and administrative agents of the government in the exercise of their duties, at points too distant from the seat of government to admit of instructions adapted to the constantly varying circumstances and often unexpected contingencies incident to the public service. The generals, as other officers of inferior grade, in command of military posts widely separated, and of separate detachments—governors of Territories, superintendents of Indian affairs, and Indian agents—are often compelled to act in important and untried emergencies without any instructions from the government; and as it is not to be supposed that among the great number of officials many will not be found incompetent to exercise a sound discretion in any case, and some who will be more intent to advance their individual views than the public interest, important duties will often be wholly neglected, measures sometimes adopted of the most mischievous tendency, Indian wars provoked or entered upon for slight causes, and prosecuted with reckless cost. These, and others that might be enumerated, are not transient evils of a newly extended dominion. They result, by inevitable consequence, from the exercise of delegated authority in remote sections, where the power of the government is less feared or respected, and sometimes defied—where there can be no direct supervision, no prompt corrective applied by the executive head of the government. The invention of telegraphic communication, though in time it may lessen, cannot overcome the impediments to an efficient or safe administration in States and Territories two or three thousand miles distant from the seat of the general government.

But still the cry is for more territory. The President gravely announces that “expansion is the future policy of the country, and none but cowards fear and oppose it.” The Vice President chimes in; the Senator from Georgia (Mr. Toombs) declares that “progress and development throughout the tropics is the fixed and unalterable policy of this country, regardless of consequences to the nations of Europe.” These are important, and it may be ominous announcements, but I wait the response of the people. Mr. Jefferson said that Cuba would be the *ne plus ultra* of his desires in that direction. Mr. Calhoun was willing to see our dominion extended over the entire valley of the Rio Grande. He would make the Sierra Madre the “ultima thule” of our advance in the same direction. He revolted at the idea of incorporating the mongrel population south of that line into our system. The time was, when the authority of two such names might be expected to arrest all such extravagant schemes of national aggrandizement; but in this age of progress, the sentiment of veneration for the fathers of the Republic, their principles and precepts, has become so well nigh extinct throughout the land, that but little is to be hoped from their opinions in staying the progress of this reckless policy.

But, Mr. President, there is a graver objection to the mad career into which it is proposed to precipitate the country than any I have yet adverted to. When we shall have extended our dominion over the Mexican and Central American States, we shall have increased our territorial area by one million of square miles, added five thousand miles to our present sea-coast frontier, making together ten thousand miles, and a mixed population of eleven

millions, not more than a million and a half of which can boast the pure blood of the white race, and the remainder being, for the most part, a feeble and indolent people, incapable of appreciating or of maintaining a free government. If the policy of annexing those countries is connected with the idea of becoming a great military power, nothing could be more delusive and preposterous. Sir, when this policy shall be consummated, if it ever should be, the statesmen of Great Britain and France, and of every other monarchy of Europe, might well confess to a sentiment of exultation. The dread of the example, and all fears and jealousies of the growing powers and resources of the great Republic of the New World, would cease. Sir, I venture to say, that neither Great Britain nor France would be disposed to fire a gun, or to interpose the slightest obstacle to the acquisition; but, on the contrary, would yield their full consent, on condition of being secured in the free enjoyment of the several transit routes between the two oceans for the benefit of their commerce, and a guarantee of the debts due from these States to their respective subjects. What more could they desire? They already have a guarantee in the defenceless condition of our possessions on the Pacific coast—of our disposition to cultivate amicable relations with them. They would regard the acquisition of Mexico and Central America as a new gage or additional security to keep the peace with them. If these powers have no treaty engagements with Spain to embarrass them, and we should engage to annex all Mexico and Central America, I have no doubt they would let us take Cuba also upon the same conditions.

It may be that it was this perception of the true policy and probable disposition of these two powers that led to such a display of cheap courage by the President and the Senator from Georgia in the declarations I have before alluded to.

The advantage of the extension of our dominion over these countries would redound, in the first place, to the people who inhabited them. By the establishment of regular government, and bringing order out of the chaos which now reigns there—by the infusion of a more enterprising race—we might succeed in stimulating into some degree of activity the almost extinct energies of the native population. Whatever might be the extent of the internal commerce between the present States of the Union and the States of the newly acquired countries, the benefits of it would be shared between them all; but all other advantages resulting from the change of sovereignty would be largely participated in by the great commercial States of Europe. In fact, Great Britain and France would be in a position to derive all the benefits of the increased foreign trade and commerce which might be expected to follow the annexation of those countries to the United States that they could reasonably derive without the burden of their protection and defence. They would be in a position to do more. They could dictate, and they would dictate, the commercial policy of the United States; they would be powerful auxiliaries of the Senator from Virginia [Mr. HUNTER] in the establishment of his favorite doctrine of political economy—free trade; they would go heart and hand with him in allowing no more revenue to be raised by import duties than would be necessary to support the government economically administered; they would probably agree with him that a horizontal tariff, and no free articles, would be most just and equitable for all interests. We might calculate on their generosity so far as to allow a revenue for the support of an army large enough to suppress Indian hostilities, and to maintain a navy sufficient to guard our coasts and foreign commerce against the depredations of pirates. If Congress at any time should manifest a disposition to raise a revenue for some other purpose, it would only be necessary for the British Minister to remind our Secretary of State of the generous manner in which his govern-

ment had acquiesced in the desire of the United States to extend their dominion over the rich countries of Mexico and Central America, and to intimate that his government could not view with a friendly feeling any increase of the existing duties on the products of his country. We have once submitted to the humiliation of such an intimation. But what could we safely do, upon a renewal of such an insult, burdened with the protection and defence of all Mexico and Central America? It would be considered madness to go to war, when we should have ten thousand miles of seacoast frontier to defend, and our only means of defence a few fortifications and a navy of some seventy-five vessels, all told, some fifteen of them war steamers, and carrying altogether eleven hundred guns; and that, too, against a power that could commence the war with a navy of more than six hundred vessels, including nearly three hundred war steamers, and carrying altogether upwards of ten thousand guns. If France should unite in the intimation which I have supposed might be given by Great Britain, then we should have to encounter a combined navy of a thousand ships, five hundred of them war steamers, and carrying altogether twenty thousand guns. Before such odds the stoutest hearts might quail. I think, sir, we should become a vassal nation, and so would remain, until the people, in very shame, and galled by a deep sense of the national degradation, should, in the spirit of their revolutionary sires, resolve to re-assert their independence, cost what it might. But when, by the dedication of all their resources, and after years of disaster, they shall, at last, have succeeded in raising armies and building a navy adequate to the maintenance of their independence; when, in other words, we shall have assumed the attitude of a great military and naval power, the hundreds of millions of treasure that will have been expended in the effort will not be the greatest sacrifice we shall have made; a greater will be the public liberty swallowed up in military despotism, disguised under the forms of a free constitution.

Who shall say that these are exaggerated and unfounded apprehensions of danger to the public liberty, if we shall adopt the counsels of those whose voracious appetite for further acquisition of territory, not content with Cuba, would absorb all Mexico and Central America?

Sir, it is not in this policy of continued expansion alone that I descry danger to the public liberty. The great changes that have taken place in the practical operation of our system of government; the general tendency to disorder and misrule; the gradual withdrawal of many of the guards with which the jealous founders of our republican system surrounded the outposts of liberty—all these, and many other circumstances, in our condition, that might be enumerated, may well justify some apprehension for the future.

Why, sir, the proposition now before the Senate, to place thirty millions of dollars in the control of the President for an indefinite time, would have startled the fathers of the Republic as from a dream, and roused suspicions of a conspiracy to overthrow the Constitution. But now all suggestions of the danger of such a precedent are openly laughed to scorn.

Sir, that a President of the United States should ask Congress to clothe him with authority involving a virtual surrender of the war-making power into his hands, in clear violation of the spirit, if not of the letter of the Constitution, and that a standing committee of the Senate should give its countenance and support to such a proposition, is enough of itself to demonstrate the waning influence of those principles which were long regarded as the bulwarks of public liberty.

If any further proof were wanting to show the gradual decline of those sentiments which are the surest dependence for the support of liberty, it may be found in the marked change which has taken place in the spirit and designs of

our policy in relation to the Republics of Mexico and Central America since the date of their independence.

The day was, when these Republics were taught to look upon this government as their natural ally and protector; but they are now forced to regard it as a gigantic political Ogre, who seeks to inveigle them into his embraces only to devour them.

Whoever shall live to see the consummation of the policy of extending our dominion over those feeble and ill-fated Republics, now so earnestly advocated by so many great popular leaders, will have survived the liberties of this country.

The corrupting tendencies of this government are already strong and powerful, if not irresistible, in their progress, in beating down all but the forms, the image of a free constitution; but no free government could stand under such an accumulation of the causes which have heretofore proved fatal to all Republics, as would inevitably attend the annexation of Mexico and the Central American States; they are, to us, forbidden fruits. No Eutopian dreamer ever located a Republic within the Tropics. No poet ever fabled a Goddess of Liberty there; and the primeval curse announced as the penalty of disobedience will assuredly fall upon us, as a free people, if we shall be guilty of this great transgression. The day that we pluck this fruit, we die.